

Pomegranate: The symbol of Mysticism in Uzbekistan

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When I checked in to the Kokus Plaza Hotel in Tashkent, Uzbekistan with my wife and niece on August 4, 2021, a faux fruit decorative of pomegranate drew my attention on the front desk. This piece was peculiar making in that the side of it was open and one could see the seeds of pomegranate. I had never seen such a piece of art in my life. I remembered a poem in the Farsi language, saying, one has to travel many times to become wise and ripe. I thought this piece of art must be indicating something important. I remembered again what the Prophet of Islam said, "From the cradle to grave seek knowledge." So, I had to find out the meaning of an open pomegranate or the significance of pomegranates in Uzbekistan.

The significance of Pomegranates is very much universal and is mentioned in almost all religious and cultural scriptures and ancient books.

In the Greek mythology, pomegranate is the sign of wealth, productivity and to generate generation.

In Hinduism, in the book of Vedas, pomegranates are symbol of fertility and prosperity.

In the ancient Khorasan, pomegranate for Zoroastrians was the symbol of the soul's immortality and the perfection for nature. In the *Shabe Yalda* (Birth Night), the evening of the last day of fall, after sunset, there are huge festivities to celebrate for the longest night in Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan. Among other foods and fruits, pomegranate is placed as a sign of fertility, hoping for pregnancy, joy of life and happiness.

In the Jewish culture, pomegranate is a symbol of righteousness, knowledge and wisdom. Also, symbolize fertility and love. Like *Shabe Yalda* in ancient Khorasan, they also place it among other food on the second night of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year festival.

In the Bible we read, "And on the skirts thereof thou shalt make pomegranate of blue, and purple, and scarlet, round about the skirts thereof; and bells of gold between them round about." (Exodus 28:33). Also, "And Saul abode at the extreme end of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which was in Migron." (Samuel 14:2).

In the Quran revealed 1400 years ago, (Verse 99, Chapter 6) mentions fruits and vegetables and asks people to look at it. In verse 68 chapter 55, Pomegranate is mentioned as a favor of Allah (God) to humanity. Scholars of Islam call pomegranate as a fruit of the paradise because of its benefits to health and well-being. Professor Chafique Younos, a renown medical plants expert and pharmacologist in France, mentions the pomegranate in his book, *The Wisdom and the Role of Quranic Plants*, quoting from the Prophet of Islam, "There is no pomegranate that will not have the seeds of the pomegranate of Heaven."

When we visited the famous Kunst Historical Museum in Vienna, Austria, my niece, Nastaran Qassemi who loves art and culture drew my attention to a painting of the Emperor Maximilian (1519) who had a pomegranate in his hand. This painting told us that pomegranate is not just a cultural tradition but a symbol of power even among the aristocrats. When we visited Granada in Spain during this trip, again pomegranate was an important symbol of life and fertility to the extent that the city's name, Granada, in the Spanish language means pomegranate.

The health benefits are enormous. Avicenna mentions that pomegranate is useful for treatment of liver disease and treatment of skin and skin complications. Pomegranate is called the heart elixir. This fruit contains phytonutrients and antioxidants, meaning it will help reduce inflammation, fight disease, fight cancer, improve memory, improve sexual function (which is why it is a symbol of fertility), protect the brain from oxidative stress, lower blood pressure, reduce cholesterol, protects the heart because it lowers the blood pressure and cholesterol and for fighting infection, building strong bones because it is a source of vitamin K.

Since Muslims translated many Greek philosophical and mythological treaties of the Greek, they had it also in their medical books, and it became a symbol of productivity in Islamic culture and territories such as Turkey, Uzbekistan, Iran and other neighboring countries, in the ancient Khurasan, the Persian Plateau that consist of Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.

There are more than hundreds of poems about the beauty of the pomegranate in Farsi language, and mystical sayings such as, “the pomegranate does not have a season. Whenever you smile at it, it blooms.

Visiting the tomb of Bahauddin Naqshbandi, the founder of Naqshbandi path in Islamic mysticism in Bukhara, is very interesting, although some scholars do not see Bahauddin as the founder of Naqshbandia path but the continuation of Khawjagan in Bukhara. However, the majority sees Bahauddin Naqshbandi as the epicenter of Naqshbandi mysticism. First of all, on the top of the tomb there is a tall pole with a fruit faux of pomegranate hanging. This will make us think more about the pomegranate. The mystic illustration Pomegranates is eye opening. First of all, the color red symbolizes the redness glory of the sun. Pomegranate is called the king of all fruits. This is because it has a crown on the top and has hundreds of seeds inside like jewels. These jewels are the jewels of heaven. Inside, there are curtains that divide these parts or chambers of jewels. There are four chambers. Each chamber of the pomegranate represents the principle of mysticism. Tariqat (Path), Ma’refat (Knowledge), A’dalat (justice), and Haqiqat (The Truth).

Uzbekistan, particularly Samarkand and Bukhara, once upon a time, being the center of Islamic civilization in Central Asia with Naqshbandi path in which spread all over the Middle East and India has a huge cultural impact on the people of the region. Consequently, Uzbeks are very sophisticated people and highly cultured.

The purpose of traveling in Islamic culture is not leisure or to do business only, but to learn and explore about yourself and your values. Understand your own existence in the universe and also explore the world for your own good and good of others. Most importantly, appreciate life, joy of life, the jewels of life like a pomegranate that are all a gift of Allah (SWT).

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